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Opioid drug dependence on the rise

Jennifer Joseph

A DECREASE in the proportion of opioid-dependent clients aged 29 years or younger has been overshadowed by an increase in the number of clients being treated for opioid drug dependence since 2007.

The latest report by the **Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)** analysing the National Opioid Pharmacotherapy Statistics Annual Data Collection, shows there were 43,445 clients being treated with medication for opioid dependence on 30 June 2009, compared to 41,347 in 2008.

Amber Jefferson of the AIHW's Drug Surveys and Services Unit said the proportion of those aged 40 to 49 rose slightly.

Clients aged between 20 and 49 years of age made up 86 per cent of the treatment group, while those 30–39 years of age made up the largest proportion of clients (40 per cent).

Those aged 40–49 years made up 29 per cent and those aged 20–29 years made up 18 per cent of clients, a decrease from 22 per cent in 2008.

The report shows that the number of prescribers fell slightly between 2008 and 2009 from 1,393 to 1,350, and the average number of clients per prescriber rose from 18 to 20 over the same period, while dosing point sites were most commonly located in pharmacies.

Despite the majority of clients receiving methadone, the proportion of clients receiving

buprenorphine/naloxone who were dosed at a pharmacy (84 per cent) was higher than clients receiving methadone (68 per cent) or buprenorphine only (57 per cent) at a pharmacy.

The report showed the proportion of clients receiving buprenorphine/naloxone at pharmacies has decreased since 2007 from 93 per cent to 84 per cent in 2009.

The proportion of clients accessing buprenorphine from pharmacies also declined from 70 per cent in 2007 to 57 per cent in 2009, while the proportion of clients accessing methadone from pharmacies has remained relatively stable for this same period.

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Pivotal year for pneumococcal vaccination program

Nick O'Donoghue

PHARMACISTS have a key role to play in reminding patients who received their first pneumococcal vaccine five years ago to get their booster shot this year.

Australian General Practice Network advisor to the National Immunisation Committee Dr Greg Rowles told *Pharmacy eNews* that pharmacists should remind patients to get their second pneumococcal shot as part of the national program.

Five years after the National Pneumococcal Vaccination Program was launched, free of charge to patients over 65 through general practice, Dr Rowles said 2010 was a pivotal

year for the program with the original patients requiring a booster vaccine.

"Pharmacists have a big role in helping to remind patients when they come in for scripts.

"They know which patients are over 65... and patients who are over 65 should be reminded that they need a pneumococcal vaccination and they should have a second dose five years later.

"I think it's a really good way for pharmacists to be more involved in the patients' care, because it value adds to the care they're giving to remind them the free vaccine is available to people over 65," he said.

Pharmacy Guild of Australia president Kos Sclavos said it was

logical for pharmacists to remind patients about the vaccine booster, but added pharmacists could eventually provide the vaccines as happens in the US.

"The cohort of patients that age are generally regularly in the pharmacy, so it's very logical that pharmacy is the right place to go and remind patients.

"In the US pharmacists vaccinate for pneumococcal, so we're saying our first priority would be [to administer] the flu vaccine and then we could move on to other things.

"Once pharmacists are able to vaccinate for seasonal issues a logical next step would be pneumococcal vaccines," he said.

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Osteoporosis treatment a lifesaver

Jennifer Joseph

EFFECTIVE osteoporosis treatment reduces the risk of premature death due to fracture, illness and injury by 10 per cent in older, frailer people at high risk of fracture, new research has revealed.

The research, published in the *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism*, reviewed the outcomes of 10 clinical studies involving more than 39,500 patients worldwide.

Designed to combat the under-diagnosis and under-treatment of a disease that affects more than one-in-two older women and one-in-four older men, the research was launched today at the 'Beating brittle bones' seminar co-hosted by the Garvan Institute of Medical Research the National Council for Women of Australia (NCWA).

Professor John Eisman, AO, Director of the Osteoporosis and Bone Biology Program at the Garvan, said the seminar focused on findings of ground-breaking research into osteoporosis treatment, mortality and risk factors.

"It is not known exactly how

deaths are prevented with effective osteoporosis treatment. We believe it may be because certain medications not only strengthen bones to reduce fractures, but also improve a person's ability to cope and recover from illness and injury by preventing frailty," Prof Eisman said.

Fragility fractures are known to cause substantial costs, morbidity and mortality, with 10 to 20 per cent of people who sustain hip fractures dying within one year.

Philip Sambrook, Professor of Rheumatology, Royal North Shore Hospital, University of Sydney and co-author of the recently published Global Longitudinal Study of Osteoporosis in Women (GLOW) said that more needs to be done to make the community aware of lifestyle factors that increase osteoporosis risk.

"The results of the GLOW study reveal that many women underestimate their risk of osteoporotic fracture.

"It is hoped that the 'Beating brittle bones' seminar will help women, and men, to identify their risk of fracture," he added.

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BRIEFS

BOWEL CANCER SCREENING

Pharmacists will play a key role in the new BowelScreen Australia bowel cancer screening program.

Developed by the Pharmacy Guild of Australia and Bowel Cancer Australia, the pharmacy based awareness, education and screening program will be available to men and women aged 50 and over.

Guild president Kos Sclavos welcomed the new screening service, which will use an immunochemical faecal occult blood test produced by Enterix Australia.

"We are excited to make this important preventative health program available to the Australian public via the most accessible healthcare provider, the local community pharmacist," he said.

CLOSTRIDIUM DIFFICILE

A hypervirulent strain of the hospital bug *Clostridium difficile* has been identified in three patients at Melbourne's Epworth Hospital.

This is the first time the infection that has killed thousands around the world, has been found in

Australia.

The hospital's executive medical director Dr Megan Robertson said two of the patients has fully recovered and been discharged, while the third is being treated for an illness not related to the infection.

AUSSIE WINTERS A HEALTH RISK

Australian winters pose a greater threat to the health of its citizens than the icy conditions experienced by Scandinavian countries a new report revealed.

The research carried out by the Queensland University of Technology found people in Sydney and Perth were more likely to suffer a fatal heart attack during the winter than other Australians, with Tasmanians being the best at handling the cooler conditions.

Researchers warned the failure of Australians to rug up properly in the colder months was putting a strain on the body leading to a surge in the number of deaths as a result of heart and circulatory problems.

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